

**TEXT FLY WITHIN
THE BOOK ONLY**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_158418

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

*The Red Tortoise and Other Tales
of Rural India*

The Red Tortoise and Other Tales of Rural India

by

BABA TRINCO

related by

N. GANGULEE

Illustrations by

FELIKS TOPOLSKI

THE INDIA SOCIETY

3 VICTORIA STREET

LONDON, S.W. 1

DEAR WOPPETS

Preface

AS an introduction to *Baba Trinco's Tales*, I address a few words to my readers, especially the young and old of the Western world.

The art of story-telling is coeval with man, and in India it is an art still living. The country has a rich and varied supply of folk-tales preserved by word of mouth; that is, they are told and retold to children by Indian story-tellers. The stories, therefore, do not always take a fixed form; but that is not a disadvantage, for variations add to their charm.

In Indian village life the story-teller has an important place because the children depend largely on him for amusement. The radio and cinema are not yet widely used in most of rural India, but does that matter? The human association of our children with the story-teller provides entertainment more intimate and real than the radio.

I now leave you to imagine yourselves listening to a dear old Indian story-teller as you read these tales.

Preface

In writing these tales I have received much encouragement from many friends. My chief debt of gratitude is to the India Society for including the book in the list of its publications. My thanks are due to Miss Diana Kilby for rendering valuable help in preparing the manuscript for publication, and to Miss Agnes Drew for reading the proofs.

N. GANGULEE.

LONDON,

1940.

Foreword

As Mr. Gangulee says, Indians love telling and listening to stories. They are born story-tellers. And, though one misses the story-teller himself with his marvellous gestures and grimaces, his horror-producing scowls and his winning smiles, Mr. Gangulee, with the skill of an artist, has done his best to make up for his absence. And, Heaven be praised, there is a "lived happily ever after" type of ending for all these stories. They can therefore be described as more true to life than much modern literature which takes a sort of ghoulish pleasure in starting with happiness, and then showing how ephemeral it is.

If I were asked which I preferred of these stories I would say "The Three Dancing Goats." It is a charming little story and well told.

And I would ask the reader to note what a large part animals play in these stories. This is only natural, for Indians love animals and animals love them.

FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND.

Contents

	PAGE
PREFACE - - - - -	v
FOREWORD - - - - -	vii
 BABA TRINCO, THE STORY-TELLER - - -	 11
THE RED TORTOISE - - - - -	14
THE THREE DANCING GOATS - - -	23
GAUBA'S JOURNEY TO PARADISE - - -	35
BUTTO, THE SON OF A MERMAID - - -	44
THE DONKEY AND THE HOBGOBLIN - - -	58
THE FIVE COMRADES - - - - -	66
PRINCE JANAKA'S DREAM - - - - -	73
THE DEAF MAN'S MENAGERIE - - - -	84

Baba Trinco, the Story-teller

OUR village lies in the delta of the Ganges—a pretty little village, for it has coconut-palm groves round a large lake; it has a beautiful temple, and it has a cluster of bamboo huts neatly thatched with straw. I might tell you many strange things about this village and its simple folk; or I might tell you of the hero who brought down the River Ganges from her solitary home in the Himalaya and fought against drought. But no. To us the story of Baba Trinco will be more interesting. For he was much loved by all children.

Baba Trinco lived in our village and left immortal memories of his gentle character. Whenever we met him we ran to greet him.

“Baba, tell us a nice story, the nicest you know. We should like the one about the fairies who could change little children into blue-birds.”

Baba, as we called him, was always delighted to see us, and caressed us as fondly as if we were his own children. Poor Trinco was a lonely man in his old age, without wife or child.

He was a man of short stature, not quite five

Baba Trinco, the Story-teller

feet tall. His fine brown face was a network of wrinkles. We loved the kind look in his eyes. As long as he was with us he forgot his sorrows and always kept us cheerful with his stories.

This friend of the village children, as our elders used to call him, was a great actor. He spoke with the manner and accent peculiar to the people of East Bengal. We took delight in listening to his curiously expressive voice, though he spoke as much by gesture as by sound. In short, there was something about this old man that drew children to him as well as elders.

It was in the rainy season (monsoon) that Trinco was in greatest demand. I remember how he visited us almost every evening before our supper-time. We sat round him and listened to his wonderful stories open-mouthed and breathless! Even grandfather, sitting at the other end of our cosy little parlour, would feel a tremor of excitement and often spared attention from his writing. Trinco, this simple old rustic, had mastered the art of story-telling, and could weave his fascinating romances with the skill of an artist.

“My precious little ones, what tales would you like to hear this evening? Just a short one

Baba Trinco, the Story-teller

to-night, my darlings; Trinco must go home earlier. Such wet weather and so damp!" he would say, with a smile.

We could not always suggest which story to begin with. So he would laugh and make his own suggestion.

"The one about ghosts and giants, or the one about the little red tortoise that killed a crocodile?"

"How could a tortoise kill a crocodile?" we asked. "And fancy a tortoise being red!"

Then in chorus we exclaimed: "Yes, yes, Baba Trinco, tell us to-night about the red tortoise."

An affectionate smile spread over his face. Now he was happy; and, wrapping himself snugly in his bright scarlet shawl, with many strange gestures he began his story.*

* The word "Baba" literally means father; but it is also used as an expression of endearment. The story-teller's real name, Trigunananda, is abbreviated as Trinco.

The Red Tortoise

“**H**AVE you never heard of a red tortoise that lived a long, long time ago in our lake? Once in a thousand years a red tortoise is born to help his race against their enemies. When this happens, the whole nation of tortoises, frogs and tadpoles rejoices and celebrates his birth.

“Such an event occurred once on the southern bank of our village lake a thousand years ago. A mother tortoise laid an egg in a shallow hole on the bank just where the sun could warm it all day. She covered it carefully with a little sand so that no one could find it. We know she was afraid of egg-hunters.

“Have you not seen a tortoise egg, my darlings? It is white and round, but not so big as this special one. The mother tortoise felt very proud of her egg and often went to see how it was getting on.

“One day, as she was coming near the place where the egg was hidden, she heard a faint voice:

“‘Quéé, quéé, Mother. I am out of my shell.’

The Red Tortoise

“The happy mother walked as fast as she could to meet her child.

“‘Quéée, quéée,’ she replied. ‘I am coming, my darling.’

“When she arrived at the spot where she had put the egg, she found the shell broken and a little red tortoise was sitting on the sand-bank.

“The mother was delighted beyond words. She caressed her baby and felt proud when she discovered that every bit of him was quite red. She hurried to her neighbours and gave them the news of her red child’s birth.

“The tidings spread over all parts of the tortoise kingdom, and in a short time there was a great assembly on the bank of our village lake. The old tortoises gathered round the new-born one and praised him eloquently. A number of grandmother tortoises blessed him and told him what things he should eat and what he should not. The chief of the tortoise kingdom begged the mother tortoise to take special care of her son, for his race expected great things of him.

“So the mother tortoise took her son to a safe home by the side of a bush. Here he was carefully brought up, and looked healthier and redder than ever.

The Red Tortoise

“In the afternoon, on clear days, his mother would take him for a walk, and then in the sandy park he would meet other young tortoises.

“The bold youngsters of the tortoise kingdom said to him :

“‘Look here, you red fellow, let us show you the way to do things. You must be taught how to get on in our society.’

“The red tortoise listened to everybody, but did not talk much. In reply to the young tortoises he said :

“‘I shall do things in my own way. None of you need dictate to me.’

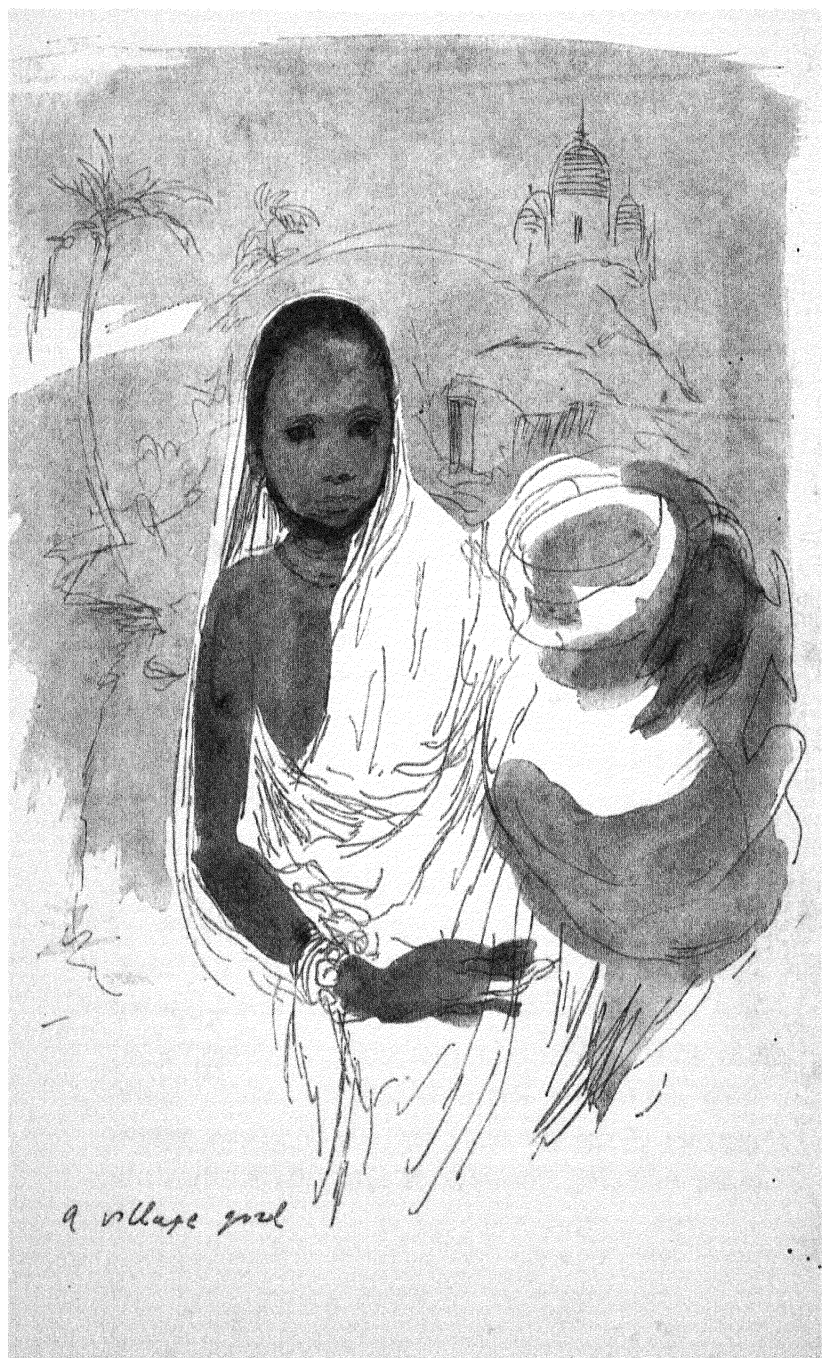
“They thought he was rather too proud of his red complexion, and they were jealous of him. Many of them crawled in the red clay to make themselves red; but it was in vain. In a little while all the clay was rubbed off!

“It happened that, when the red tortoise came of age, the whole tortoise nation was faced with a grave danger. A huge crocodile with a band of young crocodiles had invaded the lake and was threatening its inhabitants.

“So one day the elders of the tortoise nation met secretly on the bank of the lake and discussed how best they could defend themselves against such a formidable foe. It was reported



On the banks of the Ganges



a village girl

The Red Tortoise

to them that whenever a crocodile saw a nice young tortoise he picked it up in his mouth and swallowed it with ease, because from fright the poor victim pulled its head and all its feet into its shell.

“What was to be done to stop this savage attack on the youth of the tortoise nation? The aged ones suggested a deputation to the crocodile king; others thought it would be wise to leave the lake and make their home in a distant land; and the timid and sickly tortoises resigned themselves to the curse of fate, because they thought it was their inability to run fast that made them easy victims of aggression.

“The red tortoise listened to all the discussions, but he did not speak a word. He was a wise fellow, wasn't he? He knew when to speak and when to hold his tongue.

“On returning home he found his mother trembling with fear.

“‘We must leave this place, my son,’ she said, ‘and seek a hiding-place in the village.’

“The red tortoise stood erect on his hind legs and said: ‘Mother dear, how can we leave our kith and kin in this hour of danger? If such an enemy were allowed to continue the murder of the tortoises, the whole nation would cease to exist. Besides, we may have ungainly

The Red Tortoise

bodies and queer heads, our habits may be slow and clumsy, but we, too, are endowed with life.'

"As he spoke these wise words his whole body appeared to become redder and redder, and his face was radiant with patriotic fervour. His mother was astonished and embraced her son.

"So our patriotic red tortoise began to plan how to kill the crocodile king. During the night he lay wide awake on the sand-bank, thinking how he might face this cruel beast.

"Then on a sunny day he quietly crawled out of his home and marched towards the bank where the crocodile king had pitched his tent. Sitting there he began to make a furious noise in order to attract attention.

"The sentries had at once informed the crocodile king that a tortoise had the impudence to come near his majesty's camp and to disturb the peace by his grating voice. They did not forget to mention that the tortoise was red and peculiar; for his appearance frightened the sentries.

"The crocodile king was furious when he heard this, and came out to see the curious red tortoise.

"On drawing near he found that the tortoise

The Red Tortoise

was quite different from any he had ever seen.

“ ‘Such a nice, big, red tortoise,’ he exclaimed, and opened his wide mouth to frighten it.

“ ‘Do you know,’ said the crocodile king, ‘you daring little rascal, in one moment I could swallow you? How dare you come so near my camp and make ugly noises!’

“ ‘The red tortoise calmly replied: ‘Yes, my lord! I know you can swallow me, for I belong to a people whom it is the custom to swallow. Your Majesty belongs to a powerful nation and we have no means of defending ourselves against your attack.’

“ ‘The crocodile king at once picked him up and gave a little gulp. The red tortoise slipped down into the gullet leading to his Majesty’s stomach.

“ ‘Here the red tortoise performed a miracle. Instead of drawing in his head and legs he stuck out his head, wishing to see the inner chamber of His Majesty’s body. So he stretched himself as best he could and fastened his sharp little nails into the sides of the crocodile’s throat.

“ ‘Go down, I say, go down, you young rascal,’ shouted the crocodile king.

“ ‘The tortoise would go no further and clung to the gullet as tightly as possible.

The Red Tortoise

“ ‘You choke me, ill-bred little beast, go down at once,’ screamed the crocodile king, lashing his tail in fury.

“ But no, the red tortoise held on more tightly than ever, until the poor crocodile king could hardly speak.

“ Then his sentries came near the wide-open mouth of their king and thundered in threatening growls: ‘Come up, come up at once, you young rascal, you are killing our beloved king.’

“ ‘No, gentlemen,’ cried the red tortoise from inside.

“ Then one sentry said in a whisper: ‘Dear tortoise, you are so unique and clever among your stupid race that we will allow you to live with us in His Majesty’s own camp. So please come out and be rewarded.’

“ ‘No, thank you, dear sentry,’ retorted the red tortoise from within. ‘I can neither go down nor can I come up. Too many of my nation have come down this gullet. I shall hang on until your king dies.’

“ What a noise the crocodile king made! He screamed, he bellowed, he gurgled. All in vain. He could neither get the tortoise down nor bring it up.

“ After a short time the crocodile king lay down on the sand and died. His sentries were

The Red Tortoise

seized with fear and left the lake for ever, leaving the dead body of their king on the sand-bank.

“The news of the crocodile’s death reached the colony of tortoises, but it was not known how he died. However, a large number of tortoises came to the bank where the king had pitched his camp and were greatly surprised to find him dead.

“But as they came near the dead king they heard a familiar voice and wondered. The red tortoise also could hear from within the commotion caused by his fellows. So he crawled out of the gullet of the crocodile king, who lay dead with his mouth wide open.

“You can imagine the surprise and excitement caused by this sudden appearance from such a strange and unexpected quarter. The tortoises all shouted with joy and asked him to tell the assembled gathering the whole story of his adventure. His mother came out of the crowd and blessed her wonderful son.

“‘I am proud of you, my darling,’ she cried. ‘You are my brave son and you are the hero of your nation. It is not for nothing you were born red.’

“The young tortoises who in the past were jealous of him declared: ‘From to-day you are

The Red Tortoise

our patriot and leader. We therefore offer you our homage. You are so different from us because you have been sent by God to help your nation.'

"Then they formed a long, very long, procession and carried our hero—the red tortoise—on their shoulders. No one had seen such a procession before and for days the entire community of tortoises celebrated the victory.

"Since the death of the crocodile king and the flight of his sentries, the village lake is much dreaded by crocodiles. So everyone in the village is grateful for the successful adventure of the red tortoise."

Here Baba Trinco stopped and bade us good-bye for that evening; but he promised to visit us soon and to tell us the tale of the three dancing goats.

The Three Dancing Goats

“THIS evening I am going to tell you the tale of the three dancing goats,” began Baba Trinco as he squatted on the floor and greeted us with his broad smile.

“Once upon a time it happened that a hard-working young peasant was lucky enough to possess three dancing goats. He was lucky because they brought him all he desired—a little comfort for his widowed mother, and a pretty wife.

“He and his mother lived in a little bamboo hut and had a small plot of grazing land. Their entire wealth consisted of a couple of cows. When a year of drought came they were in great trouble, so that one morning the widowed mother with tears in her eyes said to her son :

“‘ Sindhu, we shall have to get rid of the two cows. So go to the market-town and sell them.’

“The thought of selling the cows they loved so much distressed the boy. It was a pity that they had not enough fodder; but what could they do?

“So Sindhu set out with the two cows and

The Three Dancing Goats

said to himself that he was not going to sell them to a butcher and that he would beg their purchaser to take great care of them.

“Before coming to the market town he met an old woman who was also going to market to sell her three goats. Both Sindhu and the woman rested under a tree and both plucked leaves from it to feed their pets.

“The old woman looked at the boy compassionately as he was feeding the cows, and said :

“ ‘Tell me, my lad, what is troubling you I know it is not a good time for the peasants.’

“ ‘What can I do? I have to sell the two cows we love so much,’ murmured Sindhu.

“The old woman asked him all sorts of questions and at last came close and said :

“ ‘My dear lad, I like you and admire your love for your cows. Let me have them and I promise they shall be well cared for. You take my three goats.’

“ ‘Nonsense,’ replied Sindhu. ‘What can we do with your goats, my dear woman? We must have grain for our own meals, and how can I feed your goats?’

“ ‘But these goats are much better than money, and they will some day bring fortune to you,’ the old woman said in a solemn voice.

The Three Dancing Goats

“Then she drew a little bamboo flute from her willow basket and began to play. Would you believe it? The three goats began to dance to the tune! They were lovely goats from the Himalayan region, quite different from the ones we see in the plains. They had long hair, long flapping ears and round noses. The old woman called them *Chápú*.

““ Sindhu was greatly amused at the performance of the dancing goats, and he believed what the old woman said about them. They might not bring him a fortune, but he would certainly be able to earn a few pennies every day by entertaining the village folk. Thus he argued in his own mind and accepted the offer.

“‘Be content with what you have got, my son,’ the old woman said gently; ‘here is the flute and there are my beloved goats. God bless you all.’ Then she took Sindhu’s two cows and went her way.

“And Sindhu? Wasn’t he pleased with the bargain! He played the flute and the goats danced to the tune. Joyfully he made his way along the path across the meadow in order to reach home as quickly as he could.

“But when his mother saw what he had brought back, she was unhappy. Sindhu played the flute and the three goats danced as merrily

The Three Dancing Goats

as ever, but it only made her sad. She thought her son had been cheated by the wicked market-folk or perhaps he had lost his senses.

“‘Are you sure you have not been cheated, my son?’ she cried. ‘We have hardly enough food to keep ourselves from starvation. What will you do with these silly goats?’

“‘Don’t be afraid, Mother,’ implored Sindhu. ‘I am neither mad nor light-headed. The dear old woman who exchanged these wonderful goats for our cows told me that they would some day bring us luck. And I believe her. If they do not bring in a few pennies for our livelihood, they will certainly fetch a handsome price from our landlord.’

“Now Sindhu’s landlord lived close to the village. His daughter, a girl of great beauty, soon heard of the dancing goats and wanted her father to summon the peasant for her entertainment.

“So one day Sindhu took his flute and goats and went to the landowner’s house. He played his flute as well as he possibly could and the three dancing goats danced as merrily as ever. Their lovely long ears flapped in rhythm and the movements of their limbs were very graceful. It was an enchanting performance.

“The landowner’s daughter offered to buy

The Three Dancing Goats

one of the goats and asked what price Sindhu wanted for it.

“‘It cannot be purchased with money, dear lady,’ declared Sindhu, adding that if she really wanted one of his precious pets she would have to pay a visit to his widowed mother and take her a barrel of foodstuffs. For he lived and laboured for his mother’s happiness and comfort.

“The girl was so eager to have a goat that she agreed to go to the peasant’s hut with a barrel of foodstuffs. Sindhu and his mother were very happy to welcome this beautiful daughter of their landlord in their humble cottage, and the girl was delighted to own a dancing goat.

“A few days later another summons came from the landowner, and Sindhu went with his flute and the two remaining goats.

“The girl came out and said: ‘You see, dear lad, I have not been able to make my goat dance at all. I have had expert musicians from the Temple to play for him, but he won’t dance. Our village soothsayer says the goat will never dance without a companion. Will you let me have another goat?’

“Sindhu was delighted both for the sake of his mother and for himself; also he was enchanted by the beauty of the girl.

The Three Dancing Goats

“ ‘Of course, you can have another of my pets, but this time I would ask for that gold ring you wear, as well as a barrel of foodstuffs,’ replied Sindhu very politely.

“ The girl was pleased, and without hesitation took off her favourite ring and gave it to Sindhu. By the time he returned home a barrel of foodstuffs had reached his mother.

“ But, again, after a few days, one of the girl’s maids brought a message from her, saying that her goats still refused to dance and no longer responded to the sound of music, so that she was very sad.

“ Sindhu went to see her and took his third goat with him. She was on the doorstep of her house waiting for him. She said: ‘What am I to do now? The village priest says that my goats will dance if you will give me the third goat; but I hate to ask you for it, as it is the only pet left to you.’

“ ‘My dear lady,’ Sindhu said humbly, ‘I would willingly part with my last goat if it would make you happy. But let me play my flute and see them dance once again.’

“ So he played the flute and the three goats danced merrily to the tune. As soon as the music ceased, the girl exclaimed gleefully:

“ ‘Now I know, my dear lad! Now I see! It

The Three Dancing Goats

was the magic of the flute that made the goats dance! Will you let me have the flute as well as the third goat?’

“Sindhu looked at her for a moment and said : ‘Yes, I will gladly give them to you, my charming lady; but now that you have discovered my secret, I would ask you to tell me the meaning of the three different coloured stones set in the gold ring you gave me. When I know that secret I shall only ask for a barrel of foodstuffs in exchange for my last goat and my magic flute.’

“The girl was rather embarrassed, and hesitated for a little while. ‘Can this peasant aspire to marry me?’ she wondered. ‘Why is he curious to know the meaning of those three stones? Anyhow, I am not the girl to give up a thing once I have set my mind on it. I must have the goat and the flute.’ So ran her thoughts.

“‘Yes,’ she said in a whisper, ‘I will tell you the meaning. There are three strange strands of hair hidden among my black silken tresses. One is pure white, the colour of a diamond; one is dark red, the colour of a ruby; and one is bright green, the colour of an emerald. So in my ring there are three stones of similar colours. But all this is secret, dear lad.’

The Three Dancing Goats

“ ‘I understand, beautiful lady,’ said Sindhu. ‘Here is my flute and there is my goat. I take my leave and hope you will now be happy with the three dancing goats.’

“Before he returned home a barrel of foodstuffs had reached his mother. But she was still very distressed. All this time they had lived on the foodstuffs Sindhu received in exchange for the goats, but what would happen to them when this supply of foodstuffs was finished?

“Sindhu had no such worry. He believed in the words of the old lady who had taken his cows in exchange for the goats. The three dancing goats would bring him luck.

“Meanwhile, Sindhu worked as a labourer on his landowner’s farm. He was happy because he could thus catch just a moment’s glimpse of the landowner’s daughter.

“Then one day it came to pass that the landowner announced his intention of finding a suitable bridegroom for his lovely daughter, and made it known that whoever could name three strands of hair hidden among her black silken tresses should have her for bride.

“It was a curious way of finding a bridegroom, wasn’t it?

“Many young men from all parts of the

The Three Dancing Goats

country came to try their luck, but not one of them could make the right guess.

“Sindhu had heard about this strange offer and wondered if he should take this opportunity of marrying the girl he loved so much. But would the landowner allow his daughter to be married to a peasant? Perhaps the girl herself would dislike being the wife of a poor farm labourer.

“These thoughts tormented and angered him. Poor Sindhu! But, one day as he was watching the dance of the three goats, his mind was made up. The thought of that old woman who had given him the goats awakened in him a strange hope of success.

“Presently he met a handsome but very gaily dressed young man on the village high road.

“‘What’s the best way to go to the manor-house?’ said he as he saw Sindhu passing by.

“‘It’s a long way from here, far across the meadows. I will show you the way, sir, if you like,’ Sindhu answered politely.

“As they were walking along, Sindhu muttered aloud to himself and sighed: ‘Alas! I am just a poor peasant, otherwise I would certainly have won the hand of our landowner’s daughter.’

The Three Dancing Goats

“‘What!’ exclaimed the young man. ‘What are you saying? Are you mad?’

“‘No, sir, I am not mad. I happen to know the secret of those three strange strands of hair. But of what use is that to me?’ replied Sindhu.

“‘Tell *me* what they are, my good fellow, and I will reward you well,’ said the young man impatiently.

“Sindhu answered haltingly: ‘You see, master, I can’t tell you the secret unless I am brought into the presence of the girl. . . . How can I enter the house?’

“The young man suggested that he would find a rich livery for Sindhu, who should enter the house as his servant.

“So they returned to the village, and the young man ordered a beautiful livery with a silk turban. And Sindhu looked very attractive in this gay attire.

“Once on the village high road, they found a conveyance, and within a short time arrived at the manor-house.

“The hall was crowded with a number of suitors, all trying to guess the riddle. The girl sat by her father on a raised platform. She was dressed simply; her beauty, grace and charm did not require the refinements of luxury.



a village boy



The Three Dancing Goats

“Nobody recognised Sindhu. He stood calmly by his master, who was constantly pressing him to whisper the secret to him. Then all of a sudden Sindhu declared in a solemn voice:

“‘The noble lady has one hair pure white, the colour of a diamond; one dark red, the colour of a ruby; and one bright green, the colour of an emerald. These three strands of hair are hidden among her black silken tresses.’

“‘That is correct, that is a splendid guess,’ exclaimed the landowner.

“Sindhu then took off his disguise and appeared before the landowner.

“The young man who had engaged Sindhu as his servant started up in dismay. ‘What! What! Impossible!’ The other suitors, too, were astonished.

“But the landowner, although distressed at the prospect of such a son-in-law, calmly asked Sindhu:

“‘Now tell us how *you* came to know this secret.’

“Sindhu caught a glimpse of the girl and felt happy. Then he related the story from the very beginning, and the landowner found the ring was the one that had belonged to his daughter.

“So he turned to his daughter and said:

The Three Dancing Goats

‘Since you have given him the ring and told him the secret, you are his bride.’

“The disappointed suitors began to jeer at Sindhu, and someone cried aloud :

“‘This is an error of destiny—a trick of fate—perhaps a curse of God.’

“Sindhu replied in a quiet but firm voice :

“‘No, gentlemen, this is a triumph of faith, love and patience.’

“So the pair married and lived happily ever after.

“That is the story of the three dancing goats, my beloved children,” said Baba Trinco as he rose to say good-night to us.

“What will be the next story, Baba Trinco?” we asked.

“One that will make you laugh,” he replied with his usual broad smile, and went away.

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

“**D**ID I promise a funny story to-night?” asked Baba Trinco as he took his usual seat.

“Yes, you did,” we shouted in chorus. So he began.

“It is about a gardener named Gauba whose one great wish was to live in Paradise, of which he had dreamt ever since childhood. But how to get there? If he were told that one could not go to Paradise with one's earthly body, Gauba would say: ‘That's nonsense! I must go there as I am, and with all those whom I love.’

“It happened that on a night of the full moon he saw a huge animal wandering in the temple garden among banana-trees laden with ripe fruit. Gauba was in charge of the garden, so he came out with a large bamboo stick, shouting: ‘Hullo, there! What are you doing here, you silly beast? Don't you know that this garden belongs to our sacred temple?’

“The animal did not seem to mind Gauba's protest and went on roaming about the garden. So Gauba came near the fence, and behold,

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

what did he see? A white elephant, white as the snow that falls on Nanda Devi.* Its trunk was like a pillar made of pure silver, its tusks were large and beautiful, its mouth was as red as an oleander, its ears were like two great ivory fans, and its eyes shone like diamonds.

“Gauba looked at the animal with amazement and remembered the legend that white elephants belong to Paradise, that they come down to the earth only on a special mission, and that it is a lucky omen for a mortal to be able to see them.

“‘What can it mean? Why has the white elephant come to my garden? Has God heard my prayers and sent it to take poor Gauba to Paradise?’ These were the questions that perplexed him.

“But he shouted again: ‘Hi, ho! O noble elephant, please do not destroy the fruits of my labour. They are intended for temple offerings.’

“The white elephant looked up and moved towards Gauba until he was frightened out of his wits. But he did not run away, and, kneeling on the ground, said, with folded arms: ‘O most charming of all God’s creatures! I am lucky to have seen you, and I salute you.’

* The name of a Himalayan peak.

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

"The white elephant was pleased, and asked: 'What is it you want, sir?'

"Gauba stood up and replied: 'O gracious elephant! I am tired of this earthly existence and I desire to go to Paradise.'

"'But what have you done to merit a blissful existence in Paradise? You are not even a temple priest,' answered the elephant, with a grunt.

"'I beg you to listen to me,' implored Gauba. 'All my life I have devoted to the care of this garden; I have grown beautiful flowers for the temple; I have provided abundant offerings of fruit for the temple deity; and I have done injury to no one.'

"'Very well, then. I shall return to the earth again at the next full moon,' the elephant assured him. 'Wait for me here and get as firm a hold of my tail as you can when I fly back to heaven. Do you understand?'

"Gauba was overwhelmed with joy. He bowed to the elephant and begged him to accept a large bunch of ripe bananas. After eating these, the elephant asked him: 'Tell me, what will you do alone in Paradise?'

"'Alone? Why should I be alone?' replied Gauba. 'I have a talkative wife and a pet monkey. I cannot leave them behind.'

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

“The elephant laughed aloud and said: ‘But how can I manage to take them as well, you silly man?’

“‘That can be arranged,’ replied Gauba promptly, ‘if only you agree to take them. My wife will hold on to my waist, and my pet monkey, Kaloo, will curl himself up round my neck.’

“The elephant was very much amused and agreed to the arrangement. Before Gauba could say good-bye to the elephant, it was flying towards heaven. Gauba looked up in amazement and kept on looking till it was lost to view in the clouds.

“Gauba hurried back to his cottage and woke up his wife to tell her about the prospect of their going to Paradise. She was rather alarmed because she thought that her husband had become insane.

“‘I cannot let this opportunity slip away,’ whispered Gauba. ‘If you don’t care to come with me, I shall be happy with Kaloo.’

“After a while his wife believed what Gauba told her, but she wasn’t as happy as her husband at the thought of leaving the earth. She was unhappy lest in Paradise she might not get all the good things of life. They both, however, agreed that their plan of going to Paradise

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

should be kept strictly secret and that all preparations for leaving their earthly abode should be made very quietly.

“But how was it possible for Gauba's talkative wife to keep such good news secret from her relations? How could she leave the earth without bidding farewell properly to her old aunt, to her numerous nieces and nephews, and to her favourite priest? The village folk who had supplied milk, oil and clothing all these years—what would they think? Besides, why should she not announce to them all that a white elephant was being sent down from Paradise to take her husband there as his reward for looking after the temple gardens? The simple folk would be jealous of him, but what did it matter?

“Such were the thoughts that crossed her mind, and on the appointed night of the full moon it was clear that she had promised to take each and all of her relations and friends on this journey to Paradise.

“And what a sight, what a clamour on that night in Gauba's cottage! Presently the white elephant appeared in the garden.

“‘Hush, hush,’ begged Gauba. The temple priests had by then gone to sleep and the party crept away quietly into the garden. The white

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

elephant was amused to find such a crowd but thought that they had come only to see off the gardener and his wife. So the good animal bowed its knees until Gauba was able to get a grip on its little tail.

“Off they went! Gauba held on to the elephant's tail; the monkey, Kaloo, sat firmly on his back; Gauba's wife clasped his waist, and her old aunt clasped hers; a sturdy young nephew was the next, and so on. Everybody was there and each hung on to the other. So Gauba's party left the earth, and by and by even the dark line of distant forests disappeared from their sight. The white elephant passed over the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, and Gauba thought that Paradise was not far off.

“Meanwhile there was a great chattering among the folk hanging on to the elephant. Only Kaloo was quiet—he had curled himself up comfortably and gone to sleep. The others began to question each other about the sort of life they might expect in Paradise.

“‘Tell me, my good husband, will the people in Paradise like us poor folk?’ asked Gauba's wife.

“‘Yes, yes, foolish woman, haven't I already told you that the ways of Paradise are different from those of the earth?’

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

“After a little pause she asked again: ‘Tell me, my good husband. Shall I have to work in Paradise as hard as I have worked on earth?’

“‘We need not worry, my good woman; in Paradise there is no struggle for food and raiment. Besides, you will not have to bother about cooking. There everything is prepared by angels,’ Gauba assured her.

“Another pause. ‘My dear husband, Auntie behind me wants to know if she will get *hilsa** fish in Paradise.’

“‘Don’t think of such trivial things, dear wife, when we are approaching Paradise,’ said Gauba.

“The wife obeyed, but his nephew shouted: ‘Uncle, are there any goats in Paradise?’

“‘Shut up!’ cried Gauba.

“But his wife could not keep quiet for long. Soon she asked: ‘Just one more thing I want to know, my dear: shall we have water melons in Paradise?’

“Gauba retorted sharply: ‘Be silent, you silly woman! There must be water melons in Paradise; the gods like them.’

“His wife was pleased, and exclaimed: ‘How big are they? How big?’

* A kind of popular river fish.

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

“This time Gauba lost his temper and let go his grip on the elephant's tail to demonstrate by a gesture of the hand how big the heavenly water melons were, shouting, ‘So big, you stupid woman!’”

. . . Baba Trinco laughed and asked us: “You can imagine, can't you, what happened to the happy pilgrims to Paradise? With the speed of the wind they fell to the earth, but little Kaloo was clever. The jerk frightened him and he jumped on to the elephant's back.

“So Kaloo, Gauba's pet monkey, went to Paradise, but the rest of the pilgrims found themselves back in the temple garden.”

We could imagine how funny they looked tumbling down on the earth and all of us roared with laughter. “Weren't they hurt, Baba Trinco?” we asked.

“Oh no, the white elephant's blessings saved them from a fatal fall. But, poor Gauba, he was very unhappy, not because of his return to the earth, but because of leaving Kaloo up in Paradise. He went to the temple and prayed God for the return of his pet.

“One night he heard Kaloo's voice, and as he opened the door there was Kaloo.

“‘Why did you come back, my pet?’ asked Gauba. ‘Did you miss me?’

Gauba's Journey to Paradise

“Kaloo shook his little head and made a funny grimace.

“‘Tell me, Kaloo, how is Paradise?’ he asked.

“Kaloo replied: ‘There are no nuts, no bananas, not even water melons, in Paradise.’ Then he jumped into Gauba’s arms and curled himself up comfortably.”

Thus ended the story of Gauba’s journey to Paradise.

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

“NOT far from the public ferry where our river enters the Bay, there lived on an island a fisherman called Tapsi. He was of middle height, wore a beard and had a broad, shapeless nose and large, hollow eyes. The villagers loved Tapsi because he was friendly with them.”

“Was he as nice as you are, Baba Trinco?” we asked. He smiled and continued:

“It was about the middle of winter. Tapsi sailed all by himself in his little boat to fish in the Bay. As he cast his net and kept his eyes fixed on the floats, he heard a strange voice emerging from the depth of the sea. Tapsi wondered what this could be, but without a moment’s warning a strong gale of wind began to howl like a homeless dog, and Tapsi’s little boat disappeared under the waves.

“As he did not return that night his wife thought he had lost his way in a thick mist; while the villagers were sure that he had perished at sea.

“God be praised! they were wrong,” exclaimed Baba Trinco with his characteristic broad smile. “After a month or so he returned

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

home with his little boat, but would not tell even his wife what had happened to him or where he had been."

"What could have happened to him, Baba Trinco?" we asked.

"Ah, that's what I am going to tell you," he replied, settling down to relate one of his countless tales.

"Well, in a few years the incident was forgotten and its memory faded even from Tapsi's mind, but ten years later, one morning when Tapsi was repairing a net, a handsome boy came up to him and said:

"'Father, it's mother's wish that I should remain on land for three years, and as she has taken care of me for ten years she thinks it's your turn to look after me for a short time.'

"He was a strange lad, tall but broad in proportion. He looked more like a boy of twenty than of ten. What struck Tapsi were his strong features and sparkling eyes.

"Tapsi let his net drop and sat motionless as though he were away in that world of mermaids where he had found himself ten years ago. Presently he stood up and embraced the boy and asked: 'What's your name?'

"'My name is Butto,' replied the boy.

"'Come, Butto, and meet my wife,' said Tapsi.

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

“The boy saluted Tapsi’s wife and said: ‘I am hungry, my Land-mother.’

“Tapsi’s wife was very much surprised, and she wondered who the boy was and how he came to know her husband. As they sat at dinner Tapsi told the story of his visit to Butto’s mother, *Gangamoni*,* and assured his wife that the boy would be a good companion to them and bring good luck.

“As surely as I am sitting here,” observed Baba Trinco with great emphasis, “the boy did bring Tapsi all he ever wished for. For years he had had poor catches, and there had not been much trade in the nearest town. Tapsi had found it difficult to make a living.

“But he went out fishing with Butto and returned to the village with his little boat full of fish, larger and finer than he had ever caught before. Yet neither Butto nor Tapsi’s wife was happy. Butto found everything in his new world queer. The house was so small and narrow that he could not take steps in it without knocking against something. The village life was dull and dreary, and, above all, he always complained of not having enough to eat. In fact, it was his enormous appetite that alarmed Tapsi’s wife.

* Meaning the Jewel of the River Ganges.

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

“Months passed by. One day Butto made up his mind to leave Tapsi and told him that he was going to look for another home where he would be fed more generously.

“Tapsi was sorry, but he said: ‘You see, Butto, you have a giant’s appetite which we could never satisfy. But as you wish still to live on land, which is so different from your own country, I shall present you with a stick and an umbrella.’

“Butto was happy to receive these gifts, but as he leaned on the stick it broke into pieces. He was then given a rod of iron as thick as an ordinary walking-stick, but the boy twisted it round his finger: it was of no use to him. All this astonished Tapsi, and he too began to think that the boy was really a giant. Still, Tapsi became fond of him and would have done anything to please him if it had not been for his wife, who refused to cook meals for Butto. One never saw Tapsi moved to tears, but the departure of this boy touched him very deeply.

“Butto took the village road and walked many, many miles. The sight of meadows and fields and haystacks was something new to him, and he thought our tiny hamlets with thatched roofs looked so funny! In the land of his birth things are so different.

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

“Towards sunset he began to look for a shelter, and he stopped near a farm to watch a peasant making hay.

“‘Where are you going, my lad?’ the peasant asked.

“‘I am looking for work,’ replied Butto; ‘I do not need wages, I only want plenty to eat.’

“‘Well,’ said the peasant, ‘I need a strong hand to plough the land, but do you know how to do this job?’

“‘I can easily learn the art of ploughing. Besides, by myself I am capable of doing as much work as six labourers!’ replied Butto, with a friendly but proud gesture.

“The peasant agreed to employ him. Butto rested a while, ate a big supper and slept heavily till morning. As arranged, he was given a large quantity of rice and vegetables for his breakfast. Then he took the plough and went to the field to prepare the land for sowing.

“Now it happened that in trying to imitate the other labourers, Butto broke his plough into bits. There were several ploughs in the shed and he tried one after the other, but it was of no use. What was to be done next?

“He looked about for something stouter and stronger than a plough with which to till the



a village scene



Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

land, and saw a large iron beam lying by the road. He picked it up, bent it across his knee and dragged it carefully over the land. Wasn't he clever? He finished his task and the land was well ploughed. Who would have believed that the work could be done in such a short time? The peasant, however, was terribly upset because all his ploughs were broken into pieces. And when he came to learn the way in which the land had been cultivated, he was so frightened at Butto's strength that he did not dare to find fault with him.

"Next day, the peasant put him to winnowing. He had six barns full of threshed grain and this was to be winnowed.

"Butto was rather perplexed because he did not know how to do this job; but when it was explained to him that rice-grains should be carefully separated from the chaff, he at once proceeded to try several methods.

"Finally, he picked up the roof of a barn and began to winnow with it. Within a short time the work was done, but the peasant was much annoyed because the roof of his barn was destroyed. Yet he was afraid to scold Butto, for fear of being beaten. However, he and his wife were greatly troubled and decided to get rid of the boy.

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

“ But how?

“ In the village there lived an old soothsayer, whose advice was sought by the villagers in all difficulties. So the peasant and his friends went to see him.

“ There in the soothsayer’s little hut they sat up late at night discussing various methods of killing Butto; for the soothsayer prophesied a grave calamity if he lived in the village. It would mean poverty to feed such a baby giant, and his physical strength might be a menace to everyone.

“ The soothsayer suggested that the peasant should send Butto to clean out the deep draw-well, and when he had gone down the villagers were to roll a huge millstone on the top of him. That was sure to make an end of the fellow. If they could kill him in this way, there would be no trouble about cremating the dead body. The well could simply be filled up.

“ An ingenious plan, wasn’t it?

“ So on the next day the peasant ordered Butto to clean the well along with his other servants. Butto followed instructions and went down to dig out the dirt and to fill the buckets. The other servants stayed above to draw them up.

“ But as soon as Butto had gone down, the

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

servants collected piles of stones and threw them down on him.

“ ‘Stop that,’ he cried. ‘Drive away the birds that are dropping sand on my head.’ The servants were amazed.

“At last they rolled down a big millstone. ‘Hooray, that’s the end of Butto,’ they all shouted in joy.

“No, Butto had a charmed life. The stone fell in such a way that he got his head right through the hole in the middle, and it fitted round his neck like a collar. Up he came and began to talk with feigned amusement.

“ ‘Well, my comrades, I congratulate you on your excellent plan to kill me.’

“To his peasant master he complained of the treatment he had received from his fellow-workers. Then, lowering his head, he shook off the millstone and said: ‘My strength is a gift from God and from my mother, and I cannot misuse it, otherwise I would have some business to settle with your servants.’

“The peasant pretended to be very angry with his servants for their conduct and promised to punish them, but he was trembling so much that he couldn’t get his breath!

“Again the peasant and his friends went to the soothsayer, put their worried heads together

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

and concocted a surer plan. Butto was to be sent to a distant village pool where a fearsome devil was known to have his home. They should ask Butto to go there to fish at night, when the devil would certainly kill him.

“So the peasant said to Butto: ‘My good fellow, I am in need of a lot of fish to-morrow morning for a feast. I shall be greatly obliged if you will row out this evening to the large pool at the farthest end of the village and catch a netful.’

“‘Very well,’ said Butto. ‘Supply me with good fishing materials and a large basket of food for myself, and I will do my best.’

“The peasant gave him everything he wanted, and Butto set out for the pool. When he reached the place, the whole world was wrapped in thick darkness.”

“What happened then, Trinco? Wasn’t Butto afraid to cast his net in such darkness?” we asked impatiently.

“Oh no, Butto was a brave fellow, and he was aware of his strength,” replied Baba Trinco, passing his open hand over his brow as if to wipe off perspiration.

“Butto got into a little dinghy and reached almost the middle of the pool and cast his net. Suddenly a huge wave swept over the dinghy,

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

and Butto was thrown into the water. Before he knew what had happened, a huge giant rose out of the pool and roared like a beast. Butto and the giant had a tremendous fight. Butto was out of his depth, so he allowed the giant to drag him to the bottom of the pool, where, as the son of a mermaid, he fought fiercely and held the giant pinned to the ground. The giant writhed in pain, like an eel when it is trodden upon, but Butto would not let him go.

“‘Let me go, fisherman, let me go! I will reward you if you’ll only release your terrible grip. Let me go!’ yelled the giant.

“‘You are an evil power and must be destroyed,’ shouted Butto.

“‘I promise to leave this village for ever! I beg for mercy!’ cried the giant.

“‘Very well, then,’ said Butto, ‘but I won’t let you go unless you also promise to bring ~~one~~ ton of fish to my master’s farm to-morrow morning. His house is next to the village temple. Do you understand?’”

“‘Yes, I understand. Let me go,’ groaned the giant.

“So Butto and the giant came up to the surface of the water. While Butto was emptying the basket of food he had brought with him, the giant ordered his little imps to catch

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

as many large fish as they could. Before dawn the fish was delivered to the peasant's house.

“‘Now, you silly giant, leave this village at once with all your imps. Do you understand?’ cried Butto.

“‘Yes, I understand, my saviour,’ replied the giant, ‘and I beg of you to accept seven sacks of gold coins as the price of my life. You nearly killed me.’

“Butto was glad to accept the offer and filled his empty basket with the gold coins. Turning to the giant, he said: ‘Remember, if you play me false, I shall kill you.’

“About dawn Butto arrived at his master's house and saw the heap of fish in the courtyard. He was pleased. But when the peasant and his wife saw the fish they began to tremble with fear. They thought Butto himself was a giant whom even the devil could not harm. Breathless and excited, they ran to the soothsayer and told him that Butto was very much alive and that their yard was full of large fish.

“Meanwhile, Butto woke up from a short sleep and waited for his breakfast. He wondered where his master could have gone with his wife at this early hour of the day. When they returned home in the company of that silly soothsayer, Butto roared with laughter

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

and said: 'Please don't bother to concoct fresh plans to kill me. I'm going away to my own home.'

"The peasant feigned ignorance of any plot to kill him and congratulated him on his most wonderful catch; but Butto could see that his master was really terrified of him. So he said: 'Listen, my dear man. My presence seems to worry you a lot. I know that you want to kill me. But, in Heaven's name, of what crime am I guilty?'

"The peasant stood petrified and stared at the soothsayer.

"'Never mind, my good master,' continued Butto. 'You have fed me well. I have learnt much from the men who live on land, and I have had a gay time working with them. Last night I overcame the devil and received from him seven sacks of gold coin as the price of his freedom. He has left the neighbourhood, and your village is saved from his tyranny. Now I return to my own country. Here is one sack of gold coins for you and another for your wife.'

"On hearing this, the peasant's wife screamed with joy and said: 'Have pity on us, dear Butto, and stay. I never thought ill of you, but this stupid soothsayer . . .'

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

“Butto’s face brightened with hearty laughter and he laid his hand on the frightened soothsayer’s shoulder and said: ‘I spare your life, you old rogue, but from this day you must work as a labourer on my master’s farm. Do you understand?’

“The old fellow had been rolling his eyes in terror, wondering how he was going to be dealt with and what sort of blow was going to finish him. He groaned: ‘Oh yes, sir, I will obey you.’ Meanwhile all the farm labourers surrounded Butto in gloomy silence, fixing their eyes on him as if he was the incarnation of a deity! Presently one of them shouted: ‘You are *Mahavir*,* and we beg you to forgive us.’

“Butto was amused, and replied: ‘I forgive you, you poor little weaklings! Here’s a sack of gold coins for all of you.’

“Then he collected his things—the remaining four sacks of treasure and his umbrella—and started again on his journey. Just about sunset he arrived at the door of Tapsi’s house.

“‘Here I am, Father,’ Butto announced joyfully, ‘but I have had enough of this life on land.’ Then he related his experience of living as a farm labourer and of his fight with the devil, and concluded by saying: ‘It wasn’t a

* Meaning Great Hero.

Butto, the Son of a Mermaid

bad job, Father; I received some treasure from that devil so that I could offer my hosts something that might be useful to them. Here are four sacks of gold coins for you and your wife, my Land-mother.'

"Tapsi looked at him in amazement and said: 'Stay with us now; we will feed you well.'

"'No, Father, I must return home to my own country. I like this land—its trees, flowers, rain, wind and sunlight; but the folk here are so strange, so selfish and greedy, so weak and jealous. They dislike me because I am stronger than any of them,' replied Butto. '

"Then he bade Tapsi farewell and disappeared. No one has ever seen him again."

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

“**H**AVE you ever heard the story of a donkey driving away a hobgoblin?” asked Baba Trinco as he met us in the courtyard.

“No, no, we haven’t. Tell us how he did it,” we replied in chorus. So he settled himself down in his usual seat and began his tale.

“That brave donkey belonged to a woodcutter, who loved the animal not because it had served him for many years, but because it was really a good companion. The woodcutter called him Jungli. Jungli was an extraordinary donkey—big-framed, big-boned, ugly to look at, but with something in his great liquid eyes that gave him a look of kindliness. His ears were longer than usual, and his tail ended in a tuft of grey hair. But the funniest part of his anatomy was his large nostrils. It was like a strong breeze when he breathed heavily!

“Jungli was fond of his master and patiently bore with some of his stupid ways. Every morning he would take bundles of faggots to the village and afterwards carry his master back to the edge of the forest where he lived. If

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

the woodcutter found the load too heavy for Jungli, he would put it on his own head and then jump on to Jungli's back! Such stupid ways amused Jungli, but he never complained, because he knew that his master was kind-hearted and always meant well.

“But wasn't it stupid of the woodcutter?

“The animals of the village also liked Jungli, for he was friendly to all. To him they would tell their troubles and woes. On one occasion he found a cat sitting in the middle of the village road with a doleful look. Jungli stopped and asked her: ‘What's the matter with you, Puss?’

“The cat said: ‘My friend, my days are over. My mistress thinks I am too old to be able to catch mice. So she planned to drown me, but I managed to get away from her. Where am I to go now for my livelihood?’

“‘Never mind! Jump on my head and come with us,’ said Jungli. The woodcutter refused to have a cat in his cottage, but Jungli would not let her go.

“Wasn't Jungli a very kindhearted animal?

“He was also very brave. On some nights Jungli would walk out of his shed and stroll into the village to meet his friends. One night when he was visiting the donkey shed he found a little

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

one looking rather sad. 'Hello, my dear fellow,' asked Jungli, 'why do you look so miserable?'

"'Listen,' replied the little donkey, 'every midnight a funny-looking hobgoblin raids the village and runs away with any animal he can seize. Last night that beast dragged my brother out of the shed and took him away.'

"'Yes, it's true,' shouted the other donkeys.

'Presently Jungli met a cow and asked her: 'Well, Mother Cow, why do you look so out of spirits?'

"'My friend,' she cried in grief, 'every midnight an impudent hobgoblin comes down upon us and kills our children. Recently he ate up my three months' old calf.'

"'Yes, it's true,' cried the other cows.

"As Jungli was making his way through a farmyard, he met a little kid.

"'My poor little fellow,' he asked, 'why is your body shaking all over like that of an animal possessed? Isn't your fur warm enough to keep out the cold?'

"'No! No! Mr. Donkey, I'm not cold,' moaned the little kid; 'but every midnight a mischievous hobgoblin creeps into our shelter and swallows one of us almost at one gulp. Perhaps tonight it may be my turn.'

"'Yes, it's true,' moaned the goats.

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

“Jungli was much distressed and wondered what sort of beast the hobgoblin was. As he was walking along lazily back to his own shed, he heard a cry, and he hadn’t gone far before he saw a little lamb being eaten by a hobgoblin. Jungli stopped and had a good look at him. ‘So that’s the beast! Now I know,’ he said to himself. That night Jungli hadn’t a wink of sleep. He laid himself down upon his straw bed wondering how this outrage might be stopped.

“At dawn the woodcutter brought grass for Jungli and found him looking rather sorrowful. So he asked him: ‘Why do you look so worried, Jungli? Aren’t you happy with me? Or, are you tired of life?’

“Jungli was touched by his master’s kindness and explained how the lives of all the animals in the village were in danger and how they had no one to protect them. The men whom these animals served were themselves so afraid of the hobgoblin that they would not lift a finger when it raided their farmyards.

“The woodcutter didn’t know what Jungli was talking about and he shrieked with laughter. This annoyed Jungli, who stood upright on his hindlegs with his forefeet stretching towards his master and said:

“‘I know I am just a stupid donkey—a mere

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

beast of burden. But I have a feeling of power, and I must use this power to protect my fellow-creatures when their lives are in danger. Hobgoblins can't daunt my spirit, master.'

"The woodcutter was struck by the eloquence of his pet and patted him softly on the head, saying: 'Jungli, your sentiments are noble; but what can *you* do to stop the wickedness of a fearful monster? If you are found in the village at midnight, he may eat you up.'

"'Eat me up! I will choke him to death,' growled Jungli in a defiant mood.

"The woodcutter tried to pacify him, saying that he would see that the hobgoblin met with his deserts for all his wrongdoing. But Jungli was determined to face the monster himself.

"So one night he jogged along to the village and hid himself in the corner of the farmyard. As soon as it was midnight he heard a rustling noise in the air and there was the hobgoblin. Without losing time, Jungli raised his massive head and stared at him, saying:

"'Good evening, Mr. Hobgoblin, what dainty morsels have you chosen to-night for your supper?'

"The hobgoblin was furious at this impudent question and came very close to our donkey and said:

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

“ ‘It’s you, it’s you I am going to gobble up, you silly animal.’

“ ‘Ah, you really believe that you can eat me up, do you, you foul fiend?’ replied Jungli.

“ ‘Of course I do,’ retorted the hobgoblin.

“ ‘Don’t be absurd, you foolish hobgoblin! You would choke! Look at my strong bones,’ said Jungli, now in a temper.

“ ‘The hobgoblin chuckled to himself and said: ‘So you think you are stronger than I am!’

“ ‘Yes, I do,’ screamed Jungli, making the kind of noise for which his race is famous.

“ ‘Very well then,’ said the hobgoblin, ‘let’s put it to the test!’

“ ‘Now it happened that a swarm of flies from the barn gathered about them and Jungli said:

“ ‘I see, Mr. Hobgoblin, these nasty flies irritate you. How many of them can you kill at one stroke?’

“ ‘As many as I choose to kill, you silly donkey,’ replied the hobgoblin.

“ ‘He then showed his teeth, threw his arms about in fury and tried to catch the buzzing flies. Alas! not a single fly could he kill.

“ ‘Now let me try,’ said Jungli in a grave voice.

“ ‘Then he stood motionless, not a muscle of his face quivering, while the flies settled on his long ears in large numbers. All at once he

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

began to flap those ears violently, and more than a dozen flies lay dead!

“‘Now, see, Mr. Hobgoblin, who has got more strength!’ said Jungli, in a tone that made the monster more furious than ever.

“‘Your ugly long ears are strong, I admit; but let’s see who has the stronger chest and who can blow harder,’ suggested the hobgoblin with a grin. Again both agreed to the test. The hobgoblin began first, and a strong breeze blew over the village! The old leaves fell off the trees and the thatched roofs of the village huts began to shake. But the hobgoblin was soon out of breath.

“‘Bravo! Bravo!’ shouted Jungli. ‘Now let me try.’

“Jungli stood up on his hindlegs, raised his tail with its tuft of grey hair, strained his long ears and brayed as hard as he could. As usual, all the donkeys, old and young, joined him in concert, and what a deafening noise they made! The hobgoblin was terrified. Never in his life had he heard such an awful sound from any animals. Perhaps the donkey was a monster in disguise, he thought.

“As the hobgoblin ran away he bumped against a huge hornets’ nest on the wall of a barn. ‘Ah, poor me, what’s happening now?’



a young girl

The Donkey and the Hobgoblin

he said to himself. Hundreds of large black hornets attacked him fiercely. Stings on his face, on his body and even inside his eyes and ears! His eyes nearly jumped out of their sockets with the pain, so that he screamed and screamed. Finally, from the top of a tree, he shouted: 'Stop that awful noise, you silly donkey. I swear I will not come near the village.'

"But Jungli wouldn't stop. He pursued the monster right into the forest, where he saw him jump into a pond.

"Days, weeks and months passed but the hobgoblin never came near the village. So after a year all the animals gathered round Jungli and congratulated him on his act of bravery. Jungli stood up on his hindlegs and received their thanks. Donkeys, cows, goats, pigs, rats, cats, dogs—all danced in procession after him. No animals had ever been as lucky as they were. Jungli, too, was very happy, and a smile lit up his face as he saw his master waiting for him with a bunch of lovely fresh grass and a bucket of green peas.

"The animals of the village talk about the legend of Jungli's bravery, I dare say, even to this very day." Thus concluded Baba Trinco.

"Now it's bedtime for you, dear children. Trinco must go home."

The Five Comrades

IT was one of India's clear summer nights and we gathered on the open terrace of our house waiting for Baba Trinco. The full moon rose above the horizon, and from our terrace we could see the village road stretching out like a white ribbon. Presently we saw Baba Trinco coming along the road, and heard him singing.

"You seem to be very happy to-night," we remarked as he came up on the terrace.

"Yes, Baba Trinco is always happy because his real friends are children and birds," replied he with that tender, charming smile that attracted us all to him.

"To-night," he continued, "I shall tell you the story of a holy man who lived in a dense forest and taught animals to be kind to each other. The forest was on the slope of a magic mountain and there the holy man built a tiny hut of wattles and mud. Its roof was thatched with straw. Every morning he would pray: 'O Deity of the forest, send me a morsel of food and a jug of water,' and every morning the deity would place before him a plateful of food and a pitcher of water.

The Five Comrades

“One night the holy man suddenly heard a voice: ‘What are you doing here in the forest? You are of no use to its inhabitants’—and he jumped up and thought that the deity was annoyed with him. But what could he do?

“So he closed his eyes and lost himself in thinking how he might serve the living creatures of the forest.

“Days passed. The holy man was still thinking what he must do to please the deity of the forest, until one morning he started up in a sweat as if someone had thrown a bucket of water over him. As he opened his eyes he saw a black-faced monkey, a graceful deer, a wise-looking owl and an enormous field-rat in front of him. All of them were staring at his bald head and wonderful eyes.

“‘What do you want from me, my dear creatures?’ he asked, stroking his white beard, which looked like the tail of a fish.

“‘We want justice,’ the owl said in a mournful voice. ‘All the powerful animals in the forest are pitiless towards the weaker ones.’

“‘Can that be true? Very well, my dear creatures, I will set you free from such fears,’ the hermit assured them, becoming absorbed in thought and leaning his cheek upon his hand.

“Now a clever hunter had prepared a trap

The Five Comrades

and a great many nets to catch tigers. Near the door of the trap he had tied a white-haired goat to tempt the tiger into the nets. Night fell and the forest became darker and darker. It was in such black-outs that the wild animals seized upon their prey.

“From a distance the ferocious tiger could distinguish the goat because its fur was white. Step by step, treading softly on the ground, the tiger approached the trap. And the poor goat, sensing the danger, began to bleat piteously, ‘Baa, Baaa, Baaaa!’

“But who was there to rescue the goat? The owls hooted, the monkeys sprang to and fro on the trees and screeched, the deer looked for safety, and the field-rats ran into their holes.

“Instantly the tiger entered the trap and fell upon the goat. What a lovely meal he was going to enjoy, thought the tiger, and he decided to return to his lair with the victim. But, behold, he found himself caught in the net! Wasn’t the tiger in a rage? He roared like thunder, pressed his sharp claws against the string, used his fearful teeth to bite through it—but all in vain.

“Presently our holy man came towards the tiger and said: ‘I see you are entrapped in a net.’ The tiger growled. Then came a band of jackals, and one of them shouted: ‘Hello,

68

The Five Comrades

uncle. You're caught at last!' Perched upon a tree, the wise owl hooted: 'What can you do now, you wild beast? Just think of your misdeeds!' The tiger was wild with anger at these taunts from such petty animals, and roared fearfully, while his eyes shone like blazing charcoal. But to what purpose?

"Then the holy man took pity on the tiger and said: 'Listen. It's the wish of the deity of the forest that there shall be no cruelty in his realm. Powerful animals must not be so pitiless towards the weak. If you promise not to frighten or kill the weak, you may yet be saved.'

"The tiger raised one of his massive paws and begged the holy man to release him, swearing: 'From this night I will live on nuts, roots and corn, and never will I be pitiless towards weaker animals.'

"Can we believe him, O holy man?' shouted the black-faced monkey from the top of a tree.

"The tiger roared in anger.

"I believe you, my friend,' said the holy man. And he asked the weaker animals to help the tiger out of the net.

"How could they help?

"Well, deer ran as swiftly as he could to fetch field-rat, and field-rat, obeying the holy

The Five Comrades

man's order, jumped on the back of deer. When rat arrived, the holy man said: 'You have the power to deliver tiger; act quickly.' And rat began gnawing the net.

" 'Dear Rat, please lose no time; the hunter may return at any moment,' implored the tiger. The black-faced monkey, who was hiding in the boughs of a tree near by, was asked to help the rat, and both set to work upon the meshes. Just before dawn a big hole was made in the net and the tiger came out.

" 'Now, then, all of you, follow me and come to my hut,' commanded the holy man. The tiger, the deer, the monkey, the owl and the field-rat went in procession and stood outside the hut. Great were the rejoicings at the escape of the tiger, but the owl, who always posed as the oldest and wisest, hooted and remarked gravely: 'O holy man, so long as the tiger has sharp claws and those fearful teeth he will be tempted to terrorise the weaker animals. If he is honest in his intentions, let him allow us to draw out his nails and pull out his teeth.'

" 'Bravo, bravo!' shouted the black-faced monkey.

" 'That would please us,' barked the deer.

" 'His teeth are clumsy, anyway,' squeaked the rat.

The Five Comrades

“The holy man listened to them all and asked the tiger if he would agree to the proposal. The tiger became agitated and cried:

“‘That is the cruelty which is now forbidden in this realm; besides, strong as I am, I shall not be able to bear the pain of these extractions. Have pity on me!’

“No sooner had he said this than all his teeth became loose and all the nails dropped out of his massive paws. At once the holy man exclaimed:

“‘The deity of the forest has prevailed! The deity of the forest has prevailed! Now listen, dear animals. There must be no cruelty in this realm, and the deity will bless you.’

“After that the tiger, the deer, the monkey, the owl and the rat became five comrades—a gay company. They wandered about the forest, telling all the animals to be kind to each other. So the law of the jungle was changed, and the forest soon became full of roots, leaves, fruits and nuts for the animals to live on. The deity of the forest appeared before the holy man and blessed him. And the holy man was allowed to live there as long as he wished.”

Here Baba Trinco became silent and looked at us out of the corner of his eyes, smiling. “What are you thinking of?” we asked.

The Five Comrades

Waving his hand, he said gently: "Trinco will not be here for a month. The harvest is finished and he is going on a pilgrimage." Then he rose slowly from his seat and embraced each one of us, saying: "I will return to you with many fresh tales, which I shall collect from my fellow-pilgrims."

We said good-bye to him and watched him trudging along the village road towards the temple.

Prince Janaka's Dream

AFTER a month or so Baba Trinco returned to us. He looked well and happy. As he came in we all asked him what places he had visited, what he had seen, and how many tales he had collected for us during his pilgrimage.

“It was all so lovely, dear children. I walked many miles, spent many nights in taverns and visited the shrine of Juggernath,”* replied Trinco, adding: “I have heard many tales from my fellow-pilgrims. One of these I will now tell you.

“Once upon a time there was a mighty king who ruled over a vast, rich and populous land. All his subjects loved him because he had proclaimed that no one in his kingdom would be forced to go hungry and that he himself would look after the poor. All his subjects praised the king for his judgment, intelligence and wisdom.

“But his son was of a different nature. He was lazy and had no desire to become a king. Once a soothsayer told Prince Janaka—that was his name—that he would receive tidings from

* The word means “Lord of the Universe.” The famous shrine is at Puri (Orissa).

Prince Janaka's Dream

the deity in dreams. 'How lucky I am,' said the prince to himself. 'I need not bother to take counsel from one.'

"However, he waited a long time before he had a dream. And then it was a strange dream, and it came to him night after night. He dreamt that far away on the other side of a great river there was a rich kingdom where the king had built a crystal palace. In that palace resided the lovely daughter of the king, surrounded with all the treasures of an earthly paradise. It was, however, difficult to cross the river: many princes had lost their lives in the attempt. But the fair maiden was waiting for the dreamer to risk his life!

"What can be the meaning of such a dream?' the prince asked himself.

"The king was alarmed at the news that his beloved son had such delusions. A soothsayer was summoned to find out the meaning of Prince Janaka's dream. All the priests of the kingdom met in conference to discuss what deities must needs be propitiated and what the prince must do to be able to forget his dangerous dream. But all in vain: the dream never left him in peace.

"So one evening the prince himself crept into the temple of the palace and asked the

Prince Janaka's Dream

deity for help. As he lay prostrate before the deity he heard a voice saying :

“ ‘ Dear Janaka, there does exist such a palace and such a beautiful princess as you dream of. If you desire, you can even marry her.’

“ On hearing this, the prince exclaimed : ‘ O gracious deity ! tell me then how can I marry her.’

“ The voice replied : ‘ Princess Nilima—that is her name—who lives in the crystal palace on the other side of the great river would marry whoever can cross that wide, unconquerable river. Be calm and resolute. One of my strange messengers will tell you what is to be done.’

“ The prince waited impatiently for the messenger, but alas ! he did not come.

“ One evening the prince walked out of the palace and wandered about the town. There in a quiet lane he saw a beggar in tattered clothes, who followed him all the way. At last the beggar said :

“ ‘ O Prince ! listen to me. For your journey to the crystal palace of your dream you will be given all help by the deity, but you must promise to love the poor, to look after their needs and not to forget them when your dream comes true. Do you understand?’

“ Prince Janaka was excited and exclaimed :

Prince Janaka's Dream

'O dear beggar! I will always remember the poor. But tell me when and how am I to begin the journey to the land of my dream?'

" 'Tomorrow,' replied the beggar and then vanished.

" 'But how?' asked the prince.

" There was no reply.

" Returning to the palace Prince Janaka asked his father to let him travel and see some of his kingdom.

" 'So be it, my son,' the king answered, asking how many elephants and how many attendants he would like.

" 'I desire to travel alone, dear Father,' replied the prince.

" With a heavy heart the king agreed to let his beloved son set forth on his journey without any retinue.

" So Prince Janaka set out and after walking a few miles reached the edge of a forest which looked almost exactly like the forest of his dream. 'In what direction should I proceed now?' he asked himself, and then he saw the beggar in tattered clothes standing before him, who addressed him, saying: 'Bravo, Prince Janaka, I am glad to see you on your journey to the land of your dream. Here is an excellent flying-horse for you to mount, and I make you

Prince Janaka's Dream

the gift of understanding the language of the owl. The owl is a wise bird and you must listen to what it says and obey.'

"Then the beggar vanished and the prince mounted his horse. As soon as he put spurs to it the horse went up in the air and flew as swiftly as a high wind. It flew over the forest, over the valley and over the mighty river. 'What a country! It is indeed a fairyland,' murmured the prince to himself. As his eyes roved over the scenery it brought back to his mind all that he had dreamt. And when presently he saw the beautiful crystal palace of his dream, his heart leapt with joy.

"At the gate of the palace Prince Janaka dismounted and asked the sentry to inform the king of his arrival. Immediately he was granted audience, after which he was taken into the presence of Princess Nilima, the beautiful maiden of his dream.

" 'Now that you, Prince Janaka, have crossed the mighty river, my daughter will marry you,' declared the king. And after a short time when all preparations had been made, Princess Nilima was married to Prince Janaka, amid great rejoicings throughout the kingdom.

"For months the royal couple lived in the crystal palace. One day Prince Janaka said to

Prince Janaka's Dream

his wife: 'I now desire to take you to my own land. We have no crystal palace, but my parents will be proud of you, and I shall do all I can to make you happy.' Princess Nilima agreed to leave her crystal palace, and the king, her father, supplied them with all things necessary for the journey.

"One evening the party halted at the outskirts of the great forest, and the royal couple rested for the night in a tent. Now it happened that at about midnight the hooting of an owl woke up the prince. *Tuwhoo, Tuwhit, Tuwhit, whoo, oo!* What a weird noise! The prince went out of the tent, and there on one of the branches of a tree perched an owl. 'What a queer bird!' the prince thought.

"'Yes, dear prince, I am a queer bird,' said the owl, reading his thoughts, 'but I am said to be a wise one. For the sake of your own happiness, let no man or woman or child in your kingdom be forced to go hungry.'

"The owl repeated this counsel, and then hooting, '*Tuwhoo, Tuwhit, Tuwhit, whoo, oo,*' disappeared. The prince could not understand the meaning of what the owl said; for in his father's kingdom everyone was happy and life was not hard.

"The next day Prince Janaka entered into

Prince Janaka's Dream

his father's kingdom along with his bride. The king received them warmly and ordered festivities, feasts and illuminations throughout the land. Princess Nilima was not however pleased with her new abode, because it was not made of crystal. The king, the queen and Prince Janaka did everything to make her happy, but she insisted that a crystal palace should be built for her.

“‘So be it,’ the king said at last, and ordered that it should be built without delay. But meanwhile the king died and the duties of the kingdom fell upon his heir. But Prince Janaka left the affairs of the state in the hands of his ministers so that he could busy himself with the building of the crystal palace.

“So the palace was built and furnished as Princess Nilima wished, and on an auspicious day she moved into it with all her belongings. The garden of the palace was laid out with flowers, shrubs and trees. The whole palace became a fairyland, and young King Janaka now looked forward to complete happiness.

“But the first night he spent in the crystal palace he woke up with a bad dream. He dreamt that his beloved wife had turned into stone in her sleep!

“‘What can be the meaning of such a dream?’ he asked himself. The fear that it

Prince Janaka's Dream

might come true, like his past dream, horrified the king and he turned round to look at his wife. She appeared to be sleeping soundly, but there was no sign of breathing. He touched her forehead—it was cold; he kissed her lips, but there was no sign of life; he put his arms round her and still the queen did not wake up.

“‘What have I done to deserve this cruel blow of fate?’ the king cried aloud. His ministers were sent for, high priests came, fortune-tellers vied with each other in finding the reason for such a calamity. The court musicians thought that the queen might be roused from her deep slumber by songs, cymbals, gongs and the beat of drums. They also believed that the din of these instruments was a protection against demons and evil spirits. The priests chanted sacred psalms, while incense sticks and candles were lighted in a long row in front of the queen's bed.

“Weeks passed by and the queen still lay motionless. The gloom of death descended upon the crystal palace. The sky above it was overcast with great patches of dark cloud. Birds no longer sang; trees and shrubs began to wither and flower-buds did not blossom.

“Yes, everything went wrong,” sighed Baba Trinco as he paused a moment.

Prince Janaka's Dream

“One evening as the king sat alone watching the blazing candles and the smouldering incense sticks in front of his queen's bed, he saw the phantom of the beggar in tattered clothes who had given him the flying horse.

“‘What does he want now?’ muttered the king to himself.

“Suddenly he heard a voice: ‘You have forgotten your promise, O King.’

“‘What promise?’ cried the king. There was no reply. As the phantom disappeared and the king rushed out of the palace, there was the familiar hooting of the owl: ‘*Tuwhoo, Tuwhit, Tuwhit, whoo, oo!*’

“‘Tell me, wise bird, will my queen ever come to life again?’ implored the king.

“The owl replied in a stern voice: ‘You have forgotten your promise, O King. Hundreds of your subjects lie crushed beneath the misfortune of famine. The silent reproaches of your people have robbed you of your happiness.’

“Immediately the king summoned his ministers and asked them to tell him if there were anyone in his kingdom who had been forced to go hungry.

“The ministers bent their heads in shame and said: ‘O King, hundreds of your devoted subjects are now tormented by hunger. Ever

Prince Janaka's Dream

since the death of your royal father we have been able to do nothing to secure their welfare.'

"The king now recalled his promise and said: 'Hear this, my faithful ministers: I am now determined to give myself to the service of the poor and lowly and helpless. All my treasures shall be used for their relief. This day I desire to assure my people of my firm resolve to stamp out hunger from my kingdom.'

"Thereupon the king rode alone out of the palace. Men, women, children all crowded to greet him, but he rode on to the market square, where he addressed them, saying: 'From now on, my dear people, I shall see that no one in my kingdom is made unhappy by hunger. The poor and lowly and distressed must come to me for help.'

"The crowd cheered and sang and wept for joy. And the young king was deeply moved by the loyalty of his people.

"The same day in the evening as King Janaka lay down to rest in the shade of a tree, the beggar in tattered clothes again appeared before him and said:

"'O King! you have now fulfilled your promise: Do not grieve; sprinkle these red oleanders—gifts from the poor—on the lifeless body of your beloved queen.'

Prince Janaka's Dream

“The beggar vanished before the king could say a word in return.

“But he collected the flowers and spread them over the lifeless body of his queen. Immediately she came to life and said: ‘O King! I am born again.’ The king replied: ‘So am I, beloved.’

“And King Janaka and his queen lived happily ever after.

“Was it a nice story, dear children?” asked Baba Trinco.

We all agreed that it was, but our little sister thought that Princess Nilima had slept too long!

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

WITH a broad smile on his face Baba Trinco stood outside the front door and announced his arrival. As we rushed out to greet him he said that this evening he was going to tell an animal story.

"There are many amusing animal stories, my beloved children," he began. "I heard some from a fellow-pilgrim. One evening in a tavern I met a blind man and a deaf man. They were twin brothers and had set out on the pilgrimage on the understanding that the blind man was to hear from his deaf brother and the deaf man was to see for the blind brother. This partnership was good, but it often led to heated argument or even a scuffle! However, these two brothers kept us all exceedingly amused.

"Shall I tell you more about them?" asked Trinco.

"Yes, please, Baba Trinco," we said.

"They were very funny," continued Trinco. "One evening in the temple courtyard where girls were dancing to music, the two brothers made a great scene. The deaf man said to his

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

blind brother: 'I like the dancing, but I don't like those men making all sorts of gestures with musical instruments.'

"The blind man retorted: 'The men are musicians, you silly fool; and the music is excellent. But I don't care for the noise the girls are making on the floor!'

"The deaf brother wouldn't agree: he repeated his dislike for the music. The blind brother became excited and declared that the dancing spoiled the music.

"On another occasion the dispute was about thunder and lightning. We had been caught in a storm and took shelter under a tree. The deaf man thought that the frequent lightning was dreadful, but to his blind brother it was the deafening noise of the thunder that was fearful. So they quarrelled until the storm ceased!

"The deaf man was a great talker; but what surprised us most was that wherever he went all sorts of animals would freely come to him, and he would chatter with them all day long. At the shrine where we stayed he made friends with all the stray animals in the neighbourhood.

"What queer animals they were! Would you believe it? A blue jackal, a tom-cat without a tail, a blind mouse, a crowd with an iron

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

ring round its neck, a black sheep, a crippled dog, even a dancing peacock were his companions! The deaf man told me a great deal about them, for he seemed to understand their languages.

“‘What is the matter with that blue jackal?’ I once asked him. Here is his story.

“The blue jackal was the leader of a colony of jackals which had settled peacefully in a forest. One day a band of monkeys invaded the forest and threatened to disturb the peace, shrieking and jumping from tree to tree and frightening the baby jackals and their mothers. This lasted for a little while. In the meantime the jackals in council put their wits together to devise tricks by which the invaders might be driven away.

“The jackal of our story had a brilliant idea which was approved by the council. So one evening he called upon the chief of the monkeys when they were busy eating roots.

“‘Good-evening, honoured guests. I come to welcome you here,’ said the jackal.

“‘We are happy to be your neighbour,’ replied the monkey chief.

“‘The king of beasts has leased this forest to us,’ continued the jackal, ‘but since you live in trees and are vegetarian by habit there need be

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

no discord between our two communities. Besides, there is none here to set us one against the other.'

"The monkey chief was pleased to hear all this and warmly welcomed the jackal. The jackal dropped his ears and bowed, saying:

"'You are a superior animal. Perhaps you and your band may save us all from the disaster of losing the moon.'

"'How can we lose the moon?' enquired the monkey chief.

"'If you wish, you can find out yourself, O brave chief. The moon has fallen into the village well at the outskirts of the forest,' replied the jackal.

"'Let us go to the well,' said the monkey chief. And he rode away on the back of a large monkey, the others following him, and jackal leading the way.

"They reached the edge of the forest and the jackal asked the monkey chief to look into the well. He saw the reflection of the moon, for it was a moonlight night, and cried: 'It's true, it's true, the moon has fallen into the well. We must draw it out.' Then, addressing his band, he said:

"'The sun scorches the earth and raises hot wind. But the moon is refreshing, and its light

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

helps us in our nightly raids. The world must not be without the moon.'

"The jackal and the monkey chief began to take counsel what could be done to save the moon. The jackal suggested that all the monkeys should form a chain, the first monkey hanging on to the wooden frame over the well and the second holding firmly to the first monkey's tail, and a third one to the tail of the second one, and so on, till the chain reached the moon at the bottom of the well!

"The plan was accepted. The monkey chief himself hung on to the frame over the well and the chain was formed according to plan. The jackal sat by the edge of the well cheering on the monkeys to do their best to rescue the moon.

"But the weight of the monkey-chain was so strong that the wooden frame over the well gave way and all the monkeys fell down to the bottom of the well on the top of each other and were drowned. Our jackal was deliriously happy at his success and cried out: 'Good-bye, my dear monkey chief, I hope you find the moon very refreshing. Ha, ha, ha.'

"This gay mood did not last long. On his way back to the forest he was taken unawares and seized by a huge black monkey, Hanuman. 'You treacherous brute, I will now teach you a

88

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

lesson,' screeched Hanuman. Saying this, he dragged the poor jackal back to the village to a place where a weaver had a large indigo vat, and, seizing him by the neck, threw him into it.

"'You wicked beast, stay there. You will soon see how you are disgraced for your act of malice against my tribe,' said Hanuman in a threatening voice and went away.

"The jackal struggled in vain to get out of the vat. Exhausted at last he caught hold of the edge and kept quiet. But at daybreak when the weaver came near the vat, he began to howl. The weaver was rather amused at the sight of the animal and pulled it out, saying: 'Now you have a nice blue coat.'

"As soon as he was released the jackal ran and ran till he reached the forest. There he lay down to sleep in the warmth of the rising sun.

"When he reached his home, neither his wife nor his mother recognised him. His children were frightened and kept away. When the other jackals saw him they wondered who he was, as they had never seen a blue jackal before. Some of them made fun of his colour and wanted to know from what country he had come.

"Poor jackal! He tried to tell them who he was and what had happened to him, but they

The Deaf Man's Menagerie

would not believe anything he said. He howled, uttered the jackal's cry and jumped as beasts of his kind do jump, but it was all in vain. Nothing could remove the suspicion that he belonged to an alien race.

“So the blue jackal left his dear home and his tribe and wandered about the country. Everywhere he was received with utter indifference and even contempt. At last he followed the footsteps of pilgrims and came to live by the shrine of Juggernath.

“That is the story of the blue jackal, one member of the deaf man's strange menagerie. He told me the stories of the tom-cat without a tail and of the other animals. Some day I will relate these to you, dear children.”

So Baba Trinco ended his tale.

